



## Preface: Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Era of Participatory Social Web

Fidelia Ibekwe-Sanjuan, Elaine Ménard

### ► To cite this version:

Fidelia Ibekwe-Sanjuan, Elaine Ménard. Preface: Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Era of Participatory Social Web. Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, 2015, Special Issue on Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Era of the Participatory Social Web, 39 (3/4), pp.245-257. hal-01228107

**HAL Id: hal-01228107**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01228107>**

Submitted on 12 Nov 2015

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial| 4.0 International License

To cite this paper :

**Fidelia Ibekwe-SanJuan and Elaine Ménard** (Guest editors), Special Issue on Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Era of the Participatory Social Web / Numéro spécial sur les archives, bibliothèques et musées à l'ère du web social et participatif, Volume 39, Number 3/4, September-December pp.245-257

nb. Preprint : this is a different version from the published one which we cannot put online due to copyright restrictions),

## **Preface: Archives, libraries and museums in the era of the participatory social Web /Les archives, bibliothèques et musées à l'ère du web social et participatif**

**Fidelia Ibekwe-SanJuan**, School of Journalism and Communication (EJCAM), Aix-Marseille University — France, [fidelia.ibekwe-sanjuan@univ-amu.fr](mailto:fidelia.ibekwe-sanjuan@univ-amu.fr).

**Elaine Ménard**, School of Information Studies, McGill University, Québec, Canada.

### English version

The term web 2.0 refers to a set of tools that enhance and support user-generated content. Web 2.0 has made possible — and intensified global collaborative mechanisms for the production of content. Since two decades, it has been gradually transforming the traditional web, through a dissemination model mainly structured by service and content providers.

In some areas, the participatory and collaborative nature of web 2.0 are blurring old boundaries and hierarchies between professionals and amateurs. Professions related to the creation and dissemination of content and knowledge seem to be particularly affected (publishers, artists, graphic designers, journalists, authors, singers, actors, ...). A massive adoption of participatory web technologies by the general public has led to a reconfiguration and repositioning of professionals and of the stakeholders in many sectors.

This special issue (vol 39, n° 3/4) investigates the changes under way in cultural heritage institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, confronted with the widespread use of web 2.0 platforms and practices. The specific questions addressed by the accepted papers are the following:

- How do web 2.0 applications transform (or not) the relationship that libraries, museums, and archives have with their public and vice versa?
- What socio-professional changes or epistemological repositioning under way among stakeholders of libraries, archives, museums and media are caused by these new digital devices?
- How do patrons of libraries, archives and museums view the web 2.0 applications developed by these institutions to enhance their online presence?
- Are the concepts of participatory libraries or museums becoming a reality? Are we moving away from past non-participatory practices to new practices that are now participatory?
- How will physical institutions (museums, libraries, archives) coexist in the long term, alongside their virtual sites?
- Is the institutional and historical distinction between archives, libraries and museums still valid? Is it being challenged by digital phenomena and are the boundaries between them becoming porous due to new needs generated by the public social Web (e.g., “museo-libraries”)?

The eight papers accepted for publication cover a wide spectrum of institution types and of collections (museum objects, archival documents, library and herbaria collections).

Altogether, they analyse the changes wrought by web 2.0 practices and platforms from a wide range of perspectives: epistemological, historical, sociological, technological and political.

The first paper by **Isola Ajiferuke, Jamie Goodfellow, and Adeola Opeade** carried out an empirical assessment of the effectiveness of user-generated-contents (UGC) for retrieving documents in library OPACs. The authors compared the performance of user-attributed tags on the Bibliocommons platform to that of controlled vocabulary (keywords and subject terms) to retrieve documents from the OPACs of three different libraries in North America and New Zealand. Their results showed that a large number of items in public libraries were not tagged. Those items that were tagged exhibited a high level of lexical variations (acronyms, abbreviations, slangs, one letter words, spelling variants, language variants). The authors also found that user-tags exhibited a higher level of inconsistency while some tags were promotional in nature, thereby casting doubts about their real authors (users or librarians?). Their findings point to the fact that UGC is too idiosyncratic to be of real use in indexing and retrieving public collections of knowledge and cultural artifacts in any professional capacity. Aggregation of the user tags across more than fifty libraries using the Bibliocommons platform did not seem to produce the saturating effect found in Wikipedia where aggregated opinions (the wisdom of the crowds principle) have helped to resolve conflicting narratives about the object under study.

The paper by **Lorri Mon and Jisue Lee** also takes an empirical and quantitative approach to assessing social media presence of cultural heritage institutions. Using statistical data analysis techniques, the author analysed the activities of 400 public libraries on Twitter, in the United States, in order to examine how libraries engage with users on social media. The metrics produced calculated several Twitter-related indicators: library profile (how the library presented itself on its twitter account); audience (number of followers); reciprocity (number of users followed back by the library); number of tweets; joining date; authority and influence (presence on lists created by other twitter users).

In a third study, **Bérengère Stassin** offered an insight into French librarians' perceptions of the importance of library 2.0 for their profession. Through a survey of 37 non institutional blogs maintained by academic and public librarians in France, she analysed major topics found in these blogs. Her results showed that, although library 2.0 was a recurrent topic, it was far from being the most important one in terms of number of dedicated posts. Other issues such as the library itself and copyright were more predominant. She also found that librarians employed different discursive genres to write about library 2.0: opinion posts on what role social media should have for libraries as institutions; accounts of initiatives or experimentations; book reviews and descriptions of tools were among the discourse genres found. Globally, she found that librarians were pessimistic about the inertia gripping French libraries which makes them very slow to adapt professional training and culture to the rapidly changing digital environment and social practices of their patrons.

The fourth paper by **Manuel Zacklad and Lisa Chupin** shed and interesting and pertinent light on the participatory practices induced by digital platforms of herbaria (collections of dried plants). To characterise the forms of cooperation between institutional curators and amateurs on these platforms, the authors observed the modalities of the participation deployed on these platforms and evaluated possible epistemological and socio-professional re-positionings of the professional curators. The authors observed that even for herbaria sites that strongly encourage participation, users participation is overseen by curators and biodiversity specialists. The most active contributors do not have the rights to arbitrate divergent opinions

and solve litigious cases based on their experience. This prerogative still lies in the hands of the institution that owns the herbarium collection and digital platform. This form of supervised participation is largely predominant and does not engender the emancipation and liberating properties attributed to web 2.0 platforms nor does it satisfy the epistemic drive of the contributors. The objectives of the professional curators and the collection owners seem to be to avoid interpersonal cooperation amongst contributors in order to resort to a regulated coordination. The authors conclude that the digitisation of natural history collections has not been accompanied by leveraging the digital to facilitate the emergence of new and heterogeneous actors that can renew the old forms of authoritative mediation. The result could be disillusion and loss of some of the most active contributors of these participatory platforms since the emancipating and liberating promises of online participation are not met.

The fifth study by **Florence Andreacola, Marie-Sylvie Poli** and **Eric SanJuan** shed further light on how museums are grappling with the injunction to « participate » that lies at the heart of the web 2.0 paradigm. Based on a case study of a French museum, the authors developed both quantitative and qualitative techniques (surveys, semi-structured interviews) to analyse the perception that virtual and physical visitors had of museums and their activities and how museum visitors used digital technologies to share their museum experiences with others. Their results showed that visitors used digital technologies mostly to prepare their visit but that during the visit, they respected the solemnity of the physical museum. They also preferred to share impressions of their visit orally, in face to face communications, rather than using digital media.

Their study concluded that museums may be at a turning point where they cannot afford not to have an online presence since this has become mediation spaces for prolonging museum experiences. However, the online presence and use of digital media by museums need to be negotiated carefully if they are to continue fulfilling all their missions.

The sixth paper by **Cheryl Klimazewski** addresses another question raised by the special issue concerning the solidity of the historical boundaries between archives, libraries and museums faced with the technological advancements of the last decades.

Backed by an international literature review, the author was able to demonstrate that historically, there was more convergence and collaboration between libraries, archives and museums (LAMs). However, changes in institutional culture and societal needs for increased literacy rather than technological advancement have led to a “split”, with each institution drifting apart and becoming a “type”. Currently, LAMs are being “lumped” together in the literature due more to policies and strategic vision of an “integrated cultural web” rather than to a real convergence of professional practices. Nevertheless, increased digitisation of knowledge and cultural heritage artifacts has been a strong advocate for an integrated curriculum for training LAM professionals which should lead to more collaboration and convergence. The level to which practices across domains can or should converge is still a matter of current debate. Finally, the author reminds us that technological advancement is not neutral and that digitisation can lead to loss of memory of the original objects that have been transformed into bytes, subsequently leading to a depreciation of the social function and value of LAM institutions, given that more and more of their “objects” are available on the Internet and can be viewed from anywhere.

The seventh paper by **Amy Williams** brings some practical answers to the issue of lumping or split of LAMs raised by Cheryl Klimazewski. Amy Williams explored how archival practices are evolving in the web 2.0 era with the emergence of the concept of “archives 2.0” and how the culture of collaboration and participation have spread to other

cultural heritage institutions such as libraries and museums, hence to three institutions types that were hitherto held to be separate.

She examined the processes and modalities through which various bodies – be they professional heritage institutions like archives or museums or simply associations and foundations, preserve cultural heritage artifacts. Like in Klimazewski's paper, Williams observed that the digital phenomenon is an enabler of collaboration and participation. It boosts collaboration between information professionals (archivists, librarians) but also between professionals and the general public as well as helping to create communities around the preservation and sharing of specific historical collections. Digitisation has also brought about the blurring of many frontiers in the archival field. For instance, when describing a historical object, the creator of the archival description is at the same time the "provenance" (source) and "custodian" of the digital collection, this rarely happened when archives were mainly in physical form.

Current institutional policies in the United States augur for an increase in collaboration and convergence between archivists and other cultural heritage institutions.

Finally, **Chern Li Liew, Shannon Wellington, and Gillian Oliver's** study address how web 2.0 platforms and practices affect the relationship between libraries, museums and archives, and their patrons. They address one specific question raised by the special issue concerning to what extent the concepts of participatory libraries or museums are becoming a reality and whether we are moving away from non-participatory past practices toward new practices that are more participatory.

Their study goes a long way in debunking the myth of the power of social media and web 2.0 practices in transforming social and professional practices in cultural heritage institutions. *Chern Li et al.* began their study by a much needed literature review of the origins of the "2.0" ideology within the cultural heritage and preservation institutions. They showed how a user-centric approach to archives, promoted in the 1980s, predated the actual web 2.0 technologies that can enable it, and hence predated the emergence of the concept of archive 2.0. They also recalled that the post-modernist criticisms of traditional archival practices as being steeped in a positivist-objectivist stance serving only the interests of dominant groups who claim to portray the « Truth » is a more powerful argument for advocating a more pluralistic approach to cultural heritage preservation that incorporates the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders including the public. How this is to be achieved practically, whether with web 2.0 platforms or not, remains an open question.

Likewise, their literature review of the concept of library 2.0 confronted different viewpoints about how libraries should embrace the web 2.0 phenomena and underscored the fact that, although a lot has been written about the need for libraries to move to a more participatory approach, implementing this and crowning it with success is far from straightforward. Moreover, the use of web 2.0 platforms like blogs and wikis has not led to a real epistemological or sociological shift in the realm of library work and the way librarians relate with their patrons.

Furthermore, backed by empirical evidence in the form of a survey of cultural heritage institutions's use of social media (SM), *Chern Li et al.* analysed hundreds of responses from a varied group of institutions (libraries, archives) across the world. They were thus able to analyse the reasons why professionals adopted or not social media (SM), the difficulties they encountered in trying to use them. One of the reasons given by librarians for not developing SM policy is very revealing: the non-hierarchical nature of social media "does not sit well within the very hierarchical structure" of these institutions imbued with a "command and control" philosophy. Transitioning to a SM platform will then entail an epistemological repositioning of the senior management "hierarchy" who will have to let go of some of its

commands. This could have both positive and negative consequences for the institution. On the positive side: social media can be used in libraries and archives to « *engage new communities of users, provide powerful tools for advocacy and outreach and democratize institutional management of cultural memory* ». On the negative side « *the affordances of social media may impact negatively on institutional branding, alienate users and compromise information dissemination* ». Currently, the main motivations for libraries and archives to be present on SM seem to be more of an expectation: to appear tech-savvy and to be aligned with the technological practices of their patrons, to be present “where the users are”. The real participatory practice which will be transformational will be when libraries and archives accept to integrate UGC into their collections. Their findings indicate that cultural heritage institutions (libraries, archives and museums) are still stuck in the classical “one way broadcast model of the early world wide web » and that « although there has been enthusiastic uptake of social media tools, there is little evidence of the current use being *transformative*. »

The eight papers published in this special issue arrive at converging conclusions: that the oft-proclaimed liberating and empowering capacity of web 2.0 for the general public has not yet taken professional practices in the cultural heritage institutions by storm whereas it has caused a blurring of frontiers between amateurs and professionals in e-commerce, politics or journalism where UGC, user feedback and the entry of new players have upset old hierarchies, strongholds and professional practices. Web 2.0 is yet to challenge the authoritative role of librarians, archivists and museum curators as the main custodians and authors of the narrative on world cultural heritage. Although some cultural heritage institutions have experimented successfully with some form of participation and collaboration with the public (*cf.* Library of Congress Flickr experience<sup>1</sup>, the Normandy archives crowdsourcing of the tagging of 3000 photos of the first world war on Flickr<sup>2</sup>), it is still the professionals that have the final word on which UGC is integrated into the official narrative of knowledge and cultural heritage artifacts. Hence, the authoritative role of controlled vocabularies and of librarians, archivists and museum curators appears to resist in front of the participatory ideology of web 2.0.

### French version

Le terme « web 2.0 » renvoie à un ensemble d’outils web, ayant comme dénominateur commun la création de contenus par les utilisateurs. Le web 2.0 a intensifié et rendu possible, à une échelle planétaire, des mécanismes collaboratifs pour la production de contenus. Il s’agit d’une transformation progressive du web traditionnel qui, pendant près de vingt ans, reposait sur un modèle de diffusion, principalement structuré par les prestataires de services et de contenus.

Cette capacité participative et collaborative du web 2.0 peut dans certains cas gommer d’anciennes frontières ou hiérarchies entre professionnels et amateurs dans différents secteurs d’activité. Les métiers liés à la création et à la diffusion de contenus et des savoirs semblent être particulièrement concernés (éditeurs, artistes, graphistes, journalistes, documentalistes, veilleurs, bibliothécaires, archivistes, infos-managers, etc.). L’adoption massive de la technologie du web participatif par le grand public conduit à une reconfiguration et à un repositionnement des acteurs dans ces secteurs.

Ce numéro thématique (vol. 39, n° 3/4) vise à sonder des mutations ou transformations en cours au sein des institutions et acteurs des bibliothèques, archives et musées du fait de la

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2008/01/my-friend-flickr-a-match-made-in-photo-heaven/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/photos/photosnormandie/>

généralisation des pratiques numériques du type web 2.0. Les contributions tentent de répondre aux questions suivantes :

- Comment les dispositifs numériques du web 2.0 transforment-ils (ou non) la relation que les bibliothèques, les musées, et les archives entretiennent avec leurs publics et vice-versa ? Jusqu'à quel point les concepts et phénomènes de bibliothèques ou muséologie participatives sont-ils devenus des réalités ?
- Sommes-nous dans un cadre de rupture avec des pratiques anciennes qui ne seraient pas participatives et de nouvelles pratiques qui le seraient devenues ?
- Quelles modalités sont trouvées pour faire coexister à la fois des lieux physiques (musées, bibliothèques, archives) et leurs formes virtuelles ?
- La distinction institutionnelle et historique entre archives, bibliothèques et musées est-elle mise au défi par le numérique ? Les frontières entre eux sont-elles en train de devenir poreuses du fait de nouveaux besoins de publics engendrés par le web social (des « museo-bibliothèques ») ?
- Quelles évolutions socioprofessionnelles ou repositionnements épistémologiques sont en cours au sein des acteurs des bibliothèques, archives et musées et sont-elles provoquées par ces nouveaux dispositifs numériques ?
- Quelle réception le public réserve-t-il à ces applications innovantes de technologies de web 2.0 en bibliothèques, archives et musées ?

Les huit contributions acceptées portent sur différents aspects de ces changements : épistémologique, technologique, sociologique et politique.

Le premier article par **Isola Ajiferuke, Jamie Goodfellow et Adeola Opesade** étudie les caractéristiques et l'efficacité des étiquettes (*tags*) dans le contexte des catalogues de bibliothèques d'accès public en ligne (OPAC). Les résultats de leur étude démontrent qu'un grand nombre d'œuvres ne reçoivent aucune étiquette, sinon un ou deux mots en guise d'étiquettes, relativement au sujet de l'œuvre. Les auteurs concluent leur article avec quelques recommandations à Bibliocommons afin d'améliorer le repérage.

La deuxième étude par **Lorri Mon et Jisue Lee** évalue les profils et les activités de 400 bibliothèques publiques sur Twitter, de manière à explorer la nature changeante de la présence de la bibliothèque en ligne, de même que les nouvelles tendances du web 2.0 et les modèles émergents de mesure et d'évaluation. Les résultats de cette étude présentent les activités, l'influence et les pratiques d'autoprésentation des bibliothèques dans Twitter et donnent un aperçu de la manière dont les bibliothèques interagissent avec les utilisateurs dans les environnements de micro-blogues en ligne.

**Bérengère Stassin** présente les résultats d'une étude consacrée aux blogues de bibliothécaires français tenus de manière non institutionnelle, qui sont aujourd'hui reconnus comme un moyen de diffusion de l'information professionnelle. Son analyse montre que l'information professionnelle est traitée selon différents aspects : la présence en ligne des bibliothèques, l'interaction avec les usagers, le développement de nouveaux services et la formation du personnel. Cette étude met aussi en lumière que les publications (*posts*) appartiennent à différents genres discursifs tels que le billet de point de vue, le compte-rendu d'expérience, la note de lecture ou encore le descriptif d'outils.

**Manuel Zacklad et Lisa Chupin** nous livre une étude fine et un décryptage pertinent des modalités de participation de la « foule », induites par les plateformes numériques des sites des herbiers (collections de plantes séchées). Les auteurs ont observé l'activité des

internautes invités à participer sur plusieurs sites des herbiers numériques en France et à l'étranger. Ils analysent ensuite les implications de ces formes de participation sur le positionnement épistémologique et socio-professionnel des conservateurs des herbiers. Les auteurs constatent que même si les sites des herbiers qui s'inscrivent davantage dans le modèle participatif du crowdsourcing encouragent une plus grande participation des internautes, cette participation reste encadrée, les contributeurs les plus actifs qui ont la capacité d'animer la communauté ne disposant pas davantage de pouvoir pour valider les contenus en cas d'avis divergents ou de litiges. Cette compétence d'arbitrage demeure aux mains de l'autorité institutionnelle détentrice de la collection et du site. Ainsi, cette forme de participation encadrée n'offre pas des propriétés émancipatrices vantées du web 2.0 et ne satisfait pas les pulsions épistémiques des contributeurs. L'objectif des concepteurs de ces sites semble être d'éviter la coopération interpersonnelle et de recourir le plus possible à la coordination réglée. Les auteurs concluent ainsi que la numérisation des collections d'histoire naturelle ne s'est pas encore accompagnée par l'utilisation du numérique pour faciliter la mise à contribution d'acteurs hétérogènes qui permettraient de renouveler les modes de médiation traditionnels. Faute de pouvoir satisfaire pleinement leur pulsion épistémique, certains sites « participatifs » risquent simplement de perdre leurs contributeurs les plus actifs.

L'article de **Florence Andreacola, Marie-Sylvie Poli et Eric SanJuan** s'attache à l'étude des usages des TICs par les visiteurs d'un musée. Pour étendre sa présence et inviter le public à participer, les collections des musées nourrissent différents artefacts muséaux (exposition, catalogues, animations culturelles). Avec le numérique, le site Internet et les plateformes du web participatif deviennent d'autres supports et lieux de médiation muséale. Les auteurs étudient comment l'infrastructure informatique déployée par les musées facilite ou freine ces formes numériques d'expériences muséales.

A l'aide de méthodes d'enquêtes quantitatives et qualitatives (questionnaires, entretiens semi-dirigés), les auteurs analysent, auprès des visiteurs physique et virtuel d'un musée de société en France, la perception qu'ils ont du musée et de ses activités et les quels moyens par lesquels ils partagent leurs impressions (site web, réseaux sociaux tel Facebook). L'analyse des entretiens a montré que les gens se servent des technologies numériques pour prendre connaissance des activités du musée — Internet servant pour s'informer et pour préparer la visite et les réseaux sociaux servant pour décider d'aller à l'exposition. Durant la visite, les visiteurs respectent l'aspect solennel des lieux et préfèrent partager leurs expériences de visite oralement, par des échanges humains plutôt que par des dispositifs de médiation technique. Leurs résultats tendent à montrer que si les musées peuvent résister à l'injonction à participer du web 2.0 qui pourrait être passagère, ils ne peuvent écarteler les plateformes numériques dans leur stratégie de rencontre avec le public car celles-ci sont devenues des espaces de médiation et de médiatisation des expériences muséales. Les auteurs concluent que les musées pourraient être à un tournant qu'ils doivent négocier avec habileté, s'ils veulent continuer à remplir au mieux toutes leurs missions.

L'étude de **Cheryl Klimaszewski** explore les tendances de la convergence dans le contexte des archives, bibliothèques et musées. Une revue de littérature exhaustive a été menée afin de relever les influences des pratiques institutionnelles et professionnelles relatives à la convergence, la divergence et l'amalgame des archives, bibliothèques et musées. L'auteure présente les nombreuses lacunes avérées, dont la sélection pour la numérisation documentaire, la déconnexion entre les décideurs, les bailleurs de fonds et les praticiens, l'absence d'études exhaustives des usagers des collections numériques et le manque de vision au sujet du rôle des technologies émergentes.



**Amy Williams** examine le monde des dépôts numériques et la manière dont l'avènement du web 2.0 a encouragé la hausse de la participation, la collaboration et le développement communautaire. Les trois types de dépôts numériques abordés comprennent les projets d'histoire numériques, les archives communautaires et les collections numériques. L'auteure conclut que ce changement vers l'expérience communautaire dans les dépôts numériques dépasse le seul domaine des archives et des bibliothèques.

Enfin, **Chern Li Liew**, **Shannon Wellington** et **Gillian Oliver** présentent les résultats d'une revue de littérature menée au sujet de la nature transformatrice des technologies en général et plus spécifiquement, de celle des médias sociaux. Les résultats de leur étude mettent en lumière l'écart qui existe entre la vision de l'utilisation des médias sociaux par les institutions du patrimoine culturel et la réalité de leur mise en œuvre.